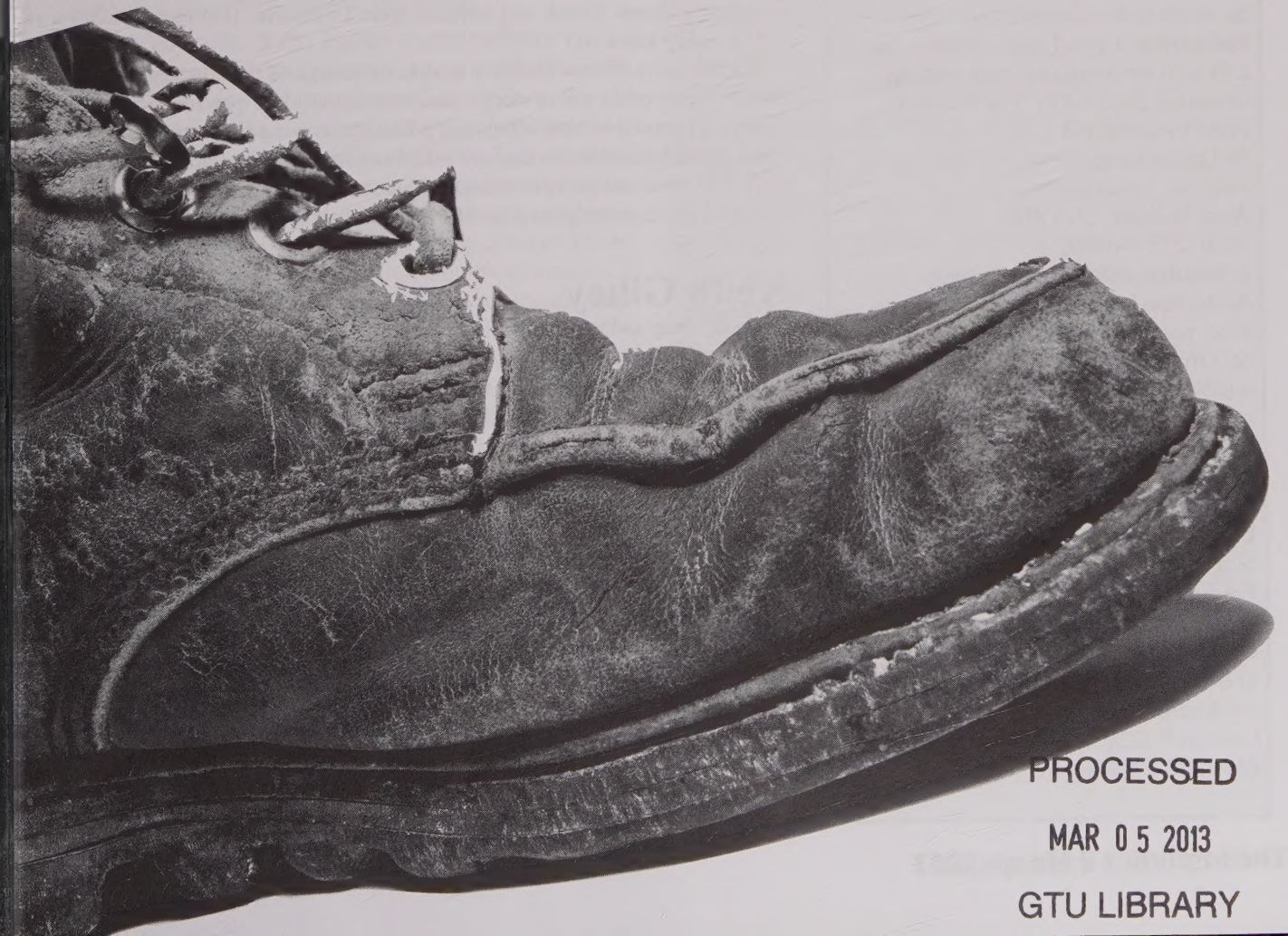


# ***WE ARE THE BOOT RESISTERS***



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# The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest

Nonconformist religious newspaper

**"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."**

*From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001*

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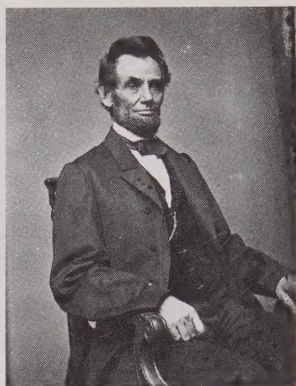
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## Editor's view

# Inspired by 'Lincoln'



Abraham Lincoln

There is a tiny historical society museum in Milford, Pennsylvania inside a white clapboard Greek revival-style house with tall columns and a deep front porch. In the 1980s I lived just over the state line in New York. Someone told me I should go to the little museum and take a look at the flag they had there.

The flag hangs inside a glass case edged in mahogany. There are 13 red and white stripes with 36 stars tacked on its navy blue field with basting stitches. Much of the thread and the white bits are yellowed by age and a large brown splotch stretches down the stripes.

The flag originally hung over the presidential box at Ford's Theatre in Washington DC. On the night that President Abraham Lincoln was shot, one of the actresses who rushed to help the president pulled the flag from the wall and used it to cradle the president's head. Once Lincoln was moved to a house across the street, the theatre manager took all the flags from the box, to prevent souvenir hunters taking them. Two generations later, his grandson donated the flag that had cradled Lincoln's head to the Pike County Historical Society.

I am told that for many years, the flag was left out on a table so school children could touch this poignant piece of history. But now it is kept safely behind glass. Tests performed before DNA technology was developed revealed that the stain is certainly human blood. The provenance of the flag is enough to convince historians that it was indeed wrapped around the injured president's bloodied head.

The scene wasn't in Steven Spielberg's wonderful new movie *Lincoln*. But I felt inspired all over again by that flag in the little museum in Milford. I was also pleased to read in Cliff Reed's article (on page 6) that some of that heroic president's closest friends and advisors were Unitarians. (Perhaps Lincoln was and he didn't know it?)

In some ways, Frank Walker's wonderful charge to the congregation at Ipswich – this week's cover story – answers some ideas put forward in David Usher's Channing lecture which was published in two parts in recent *Inquirers*. Frank offers Unitarians an identity – the Boot Resisters – a term for much of the work we Unitarians gravitate toward. There are also some responses to David's powerful piece, starting on page 10.

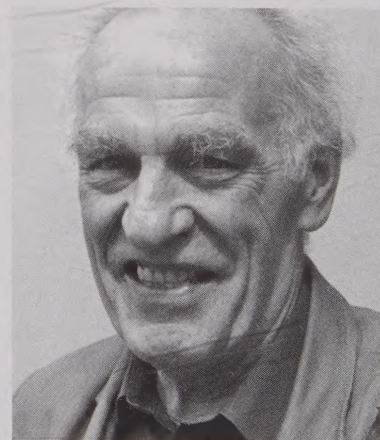
– MC Burns

## Keith Gilley

It is with deep sadness that we report that the Rev Keith Gilley, former minister at Golders Green Unitarians and former editor of *The Inquirer*, former President of the General Assembly and an Honorary Member of the General Assembly, died peacefully at home on Wednesday, 20 February, in the care of his family and a Marie Curie nurse. Keith was aged 76 years and his death came at the end of a long, brave struggle with leukaemia.

Plans are in hand for a private, family woodland burial in the near future. There will also be a service in celebration of

Keith's life this month. At press time, the date, time and venue were still to be determined. More information will be available from Essex Hall. A full obituary will appear in the next issue of *The Inquirer*.



Keith Gilley

– Celia and John Midgley



# What can Unitarians on bicycles do?

In his charge to the congregation at Ipswich, **Frank Walker** offers a template for modern Unitarians. We resist 'the boot stamping on a human face'.

In his famous novel, *1984*, George Orwell, the great English writer, gave us a striking image of what the future may be like. 'I have a vision of the future,' he said: 'a boot, stamping on a human face, forever.' What a sinister, sickening, disturbing picture. This grim possibility lurks in the background as a serious warning and threat, challenging us to make our response and say where we stand.

It's a good moment to take stock and remind ourselves of what Unitarianism is really for, what its great purpose is, what is its distinctive character, why we should wish it to continue and to flourish, and what importance it has in this hectic confusing world of today.

My short answer is that we as congregations are part of the glorious and noble company of the boot resisters. That is what we are. And to belong to the Resistance has usually been accounted a very honourable thing to be. To put it in a positive way, we are life-affirmers, pledged to respect and reverence for life. We are far from being the only ones, of course. Happily we are fellow-members of a vast and noble company, made up of all kinds of religious, humanitarian, political, commercial, educational, artistic, and voluntary organisations. Without this great company of the life-affirming resistance, humanity and civilization would shrivel and die. Our work is needed and necessary. It is life-enhancing and life-saving.

## Boots stamp on faces everywhere

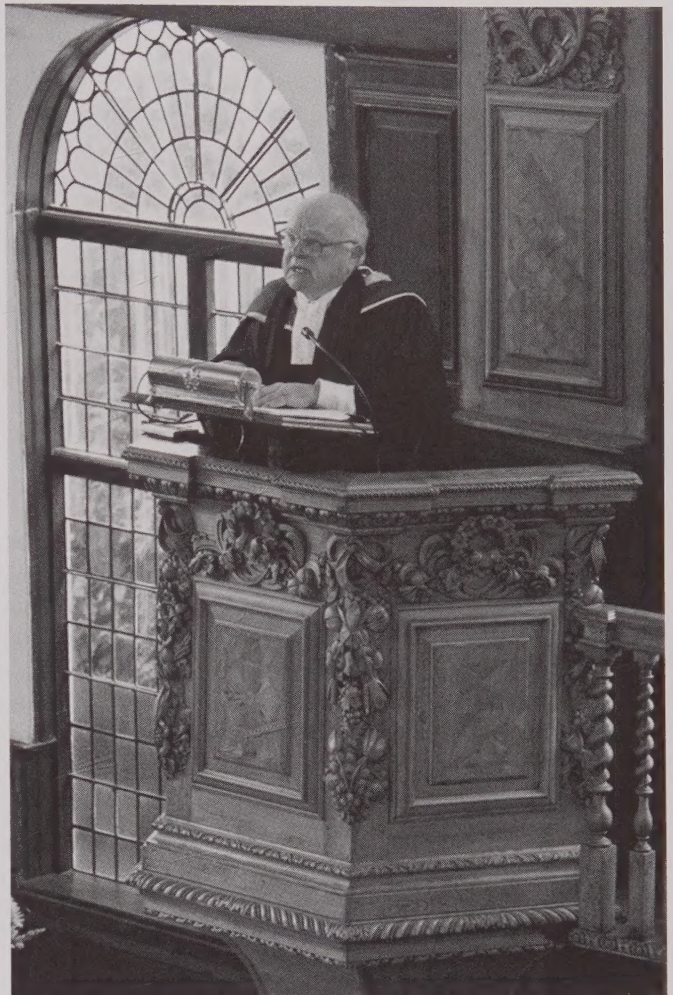
Do not imagine that it is only in dark places in Africa and the Middle East that boots are stamping on human faces. We see the horror on our television screens, and it is ghastly. But boots may stamp in more subtle ways here at home. Life-affirming resisters will always be needed even in familiar homely places.

Sometimes people are puzzled about Unitarians and do not know what they are. A few months ago, in the *Church Times*, the Church of England's leading High Church newspaper, I spotted in its Question & Answer column an intriguing question from a perplexed and anxious enquirer. He said that in his town his local *Churches Together* association organised an annual Churches Cycle Run, and this year a group of Unitarians, of all people, had asked to join them. He didn't know what to think about these Unitarians. He had never encountered any before. He suspected they might be the most frightful monsters. He might have to say to them in the words of the immortal Mr Growser in the old Children's Hour *Toytown* serial: 'You are disgraceful! You ought not to be allowed! I wonder you have the impudence to stand there and look us in the face!!' Poor man; he was afraid.

## Do not fear Unitarians in cycle shorts

Perhaps we ought to feel flattered that, tiny as we are, we are still strong enough to be frightening. I cannot honestly say that I think we are terrible as an army with banners (though I could very much wish that we were). When I see a group

(Continued on next page)



*'Jesus is a teacher of wisdom and humanity. He wants to help people to live with verve in troubled times. Give generously; don't count the cost. Go the second mile. Forgive 70 times seven. Ask, seek, knock, and find. Rescue the stricken Samaritan, bind up his wounds and help him on his way. Search for the lost; give power to the poor, feed the hungry; restore sight to the blind; heal and comfort the sick. Visit the prisoners; make peace; contemplate the lilies of the field. Return penitently, like the Prodigal, to make a new beginning. Welcome back joyously like the Prodigal's father. Do not do to others what you would find hateful when done to you. Take up your cross if necessary and follow this Way of generosity – be life-affirming boot-resisters.'*

*Photo of Frank Walker delivering this address by Giles Croucher*



# Putting high ideals into practice

*(Continued from previous page)*

of ageing Unitarians in their cycle shorts and safety helmets, puffing, panting and sweating as they valiantly pedal uphill, I cannot really imagine that there is anything there to be afraid of (though there might be something to laugh at). So I sent in a reply to the *Church Times* and tried to be more reassuring.

The Unitarian outlook in religion, I said, is very similar to that of the late Dr Albert Schweitzer, the great humanitarian. He said, 'I am a Christian in this sense, (and in this sense only): I try to follow Jesus and his Way of loving generosity, and I accept none of the dogmas laid down by the early Church or by any other Church.' This is very much the Unitarian position, I explained, and I also added, 'Unitarians as cyclists do not normally present much of a threat.'

## Schweitzer was a boot-resister

Albert Schweitzer (despite everything that his detractors have alleged about him) conducted thousands of successful operations entirely freely on people who would otherwise never have seen any doctor and who would have died in agony. He was in fact a supreme boot-resister!

What inspired his devotion and his heroic work? What is this Way of loving generosity? Can we give a clear account of it? Yes, I think we can. Jesus is a teacher of wisdom and humanity. He wants to help people to live with verve in troubled times. Give generously; don't count the cost. Go the second mile. Forgive 70 times seven. Ask, seek, knock, and find. Rescue the stricken Samaritan, bind up his wounds and help him on his way. Search for the lost; give power to the poor, feed the hungry; restore sight to the blind; heal and comfort the sick. Visit the prisoners; make peace; contemplate the lilies of the field. Return penitently, like the Prodigal, to make a new beginning. Welcome back joyously like the Prodigal's father. Do not do to others what you would find hateful when done to you. Take up your cross if necessary and follow this Way of generosity – be life-affirming boot-resisters.

All who follow in this spirit are members of the Body of Christ – this is a poetic metaphor, not a bureaucratic organisation. You do not become a member of it by undergoing a ritual act – you become a member by sharing something of the generous spirit that is in Jesus.

It's one thing to have high ideals – putting them into practice is the point, and that is something very difficult to do. Do Unitarians make the effort? I am happy to say they do, but of course we have to confess that we often miss the mark. We are imperfect creatures in an imperfect world. Even so, we can point to our good attempts and I want to encourage us and spur us on by mentioning a few of them. Just a few – there are many more, happily!

## Unitarians do put high ideals into practice

For many years Unitarians have been actively engaged in practical work such as the following: work for the release of prisoners of conscience throughout the world; providing shelter, food and advice for the homeless; pre-school education that brings together normal children and those who are handicapped; groups that foster racial understanding and harmony and civic community; greater understanding between gay and straight people in society; work for animal welfare; inter-faith understanding and co-operation; giving a home for many lo-

cal artistic, musical and creative initiatives. These are all fine achievements that deserve recognition and support.

## Unitarian tradition is well defined

Our Unitarian tradition is very wide and inclusive, but it is also very definite. It includes the humanism that we inherit from the ancient Greeks. We wish to celebrate human powers and achievements at their best, knowing too that life is tragic, but even so men and women can often meet with nobility the worst that fate can throw at them. We wish to bless and prosper the human enterprise at a time of great uncertainty. From the ancient Jewish prophets of the Bible we inherit this great prophetic insight: that as men and women we are forevermore than the beast or the machine. We are under a divine command to make something of ourselves, to be creative and to seek justice, and this is more important than simply seeking ease and pleasure.

We have the Christian inheritance from Jesus and his followers: that the highest good is the way of loving generosity. We also inherit a respect for the great enterprise of modern science and its discoveries. Good science and good religion are not enemies but partners. We also inherit a respect for the other great religious traditions of the world, acknowledging that we can learn from them, for no one form of religion has all the truth. This is a great, vital, creative tradition that the world needs. This is where we stand – and how dreadful it would be not to know where you stand.

We stand with Jesus and the saints of every religion and of none, for all that is most deeply human and humane, against the cruelty, the horror, the evil, the indifference, the triviality, the injustice and suffering of the world.

## Religion is not sentimental

Real religion is not sentimental. It does not pretend that the world is nicer than it is. Not at all. The Buddha said that this is a world of suffering. We need religion and religious communities to help us to face suffering, to endure it, and to help one another through it. That great Christian saint and martyr of the twentieth century, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, expressed it for us so well. He was a heroic member of the Resistance against Hitler and the Nazis. He paid for his heroism with his life. He was a wonderful life-affirming resister. He expressed so beautifully our need for companies of the faithful and devoted, affirmers of life who will support us when sorrow and suffering come upon us:

*O ye mothers and loved ones – then, ah, then comes your hour, the hour for true devotion.*

*Then your hour comes, ye friends and brothers! Loyal hearts can change the face of sorrow, softly encircle it with love's most gentle, unearthly radiance.*

That is our great task: to be the loyal hearts who can change the face of sorrow.

*The Charge to the Congregation, given on Saturday 3 November, at the Induction of the Rev James S Corrigan as Minister of the Ipswich Unitarian Meeting House and of the Unitarian Chapel at Framlingham.*

*The Rev Frank Walker is minister emeritus at Cambridge.*



# Chief officer testifies for marriage

Chief Officer Derek McAuley was one of the witnesses called to appear in public on 14 February before the Public Bill Committee of the House of Commons which is dealing with the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill. The Bill moved to this stage following the overwhelming approval of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading stage by MPs on 5 February. The General Assembly was one of about 25 organisations and individuals asked to appear and give oral evidence during two days of evidence gathering. The Committee will now consider amendments to the draft Bill in the period up to 12 March in order to address areas of concern and clarity.

After the session Derek told *The Inquirer*: The invitation reflects the General Assembly's important contribution to the debate on same sex marriage as highlighted by MPs, even those opposing the legislation. My initial pleasure at this recognition soon palled when I thought about what giving oral evidence involved; particularly as I would have no prior knowledge of what questions would be asked.

I was pleased that Michael Bartlett, Parliamentary Liaison Secretary for Quakers in Britain was also called at the same time and that we were questioned together. I hope that the distinctiveness of our approaches came across as well as what we share in common. It certainly took some of the pressure off as the other answered and there was time to gather one's thoughts. Our other close friend, Rabbi Danny Rich of Liberal Judaism, had appeared earlier that week when issues relating to the Jewish community were considered.

Derek described his time in the witness chair: I was able to highlight the Unitarian support for the increasing inclusion of LGBT people in society and the denomination over some 30 years and that the Unitarian churches had registered the first building and performed the first civil partnership in religious premises. I had to deal with a varied number of issues as the questioning from MPs came thick and fast. From Kate Green: How would we deal with celebrants who did not wish to conduct same-sex marriage? This was a matter for congregations and individual choice. Did we support humanist weddings? We have no official view but logically yes. In answer to Stephen Williams, I made the point that Unitarians had been open to whom we would marry, including in the past providing services for divorced people and mixed-faith couples and that we were very flexible around the form. I confirmed to Ben Bradshaw that you did not have to be a Unitarian to have a ceremony on our premises; which was quite different to Michael's response that Quakers do not see Quaker marriage as an alternative form of marriage for the general public.

Ben Bradshaw also asked about our view of Scripture which enabled me to talk about the Unitarian approach and how we drew on a range of traditions, not simply those of Christianity. There was a lot of questioning about number of members and we tried to get across the point that this was about justice not size.

I had a tricky exchange with Northern Ireland DUP MP, Jim Shannon on my feelings towards the large churches if they felt victimised or discriminated against by the law. I found this a strange question and replied that Unitarians, having suffered



Unitarian General Assembly Chief Officer Derek McAuley testified before the Public Bill Committee of the House of Commons. Photo is a screen shot taken from the Parliament video.

## Equal Marriage bill progress

House of Commons	
• First Reading	✓
• Second Reading	✓
• Committee Stage	
• Third Reading	
House of Lords	
• First Reading	
• Second Reading	
• Committee Stage	
• Third Reading	
Consideration of amendments	
Royal Assent	

discrimination, were conscious of how other people felt and that this should be addressed by Parliament. The other area of concern was how teachers with strong religious views would deal with the subject of same sex marriage which I said should be dealt with in a professional manner and we should "trust the teachers".

The evidence we both gave was described as "extremely illuminating" by Jonathan Reynolds. I was pleased to be able to say that Unitarians support-

ed same-sex marriage because it was right; not because we wished to grow, however, that weddings can be a means of people finding out about us. In reply to Chris Byrant I said that we would welcome the opportunity to hold a worship service in the Palace of Westminster (and will be following this up with him). The session ended with a recognition of the contribution of both the Quakers and Unitarians to social reform, such as anti-slavery campaigns, which were minority views for a time.

I feel that I managed to get my key points across although some issues that I expected were not raised. For example, why are civil partnerships not enough and are you redefining marriage? Michael and I both feel we presented our distinctive views despite a few unexpected lines of questioning. It must be one of the few occasions in recent times when the Unitarian and Free Christian perspective has been put to the "centre of power".

The next step is a Report stage in the House of Commons followed by 3<sup>rd</sup> Reading. The Bill will then go to the House of Lords and go through a similar legislative process with the Lords and Commons then addressing any disagreements. It may be Christmas before the full process takes place. I anticipate that a lot of work will be required to ensure that the House of Lords gives its support; although I am encouraged by the fact that the civil partnerships in religious premises began its life in the Lords and was overwhelmingly approved."

The session can be viewed at <http://bit.ly/15ss0iu>  
A full transcript is available online <http://bit.ly/WUyW4Z>  
Derek McAuley is the Chief Officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.



# Unitarians helped Lincoln in his fight

By Clifford M Reed

I expect many *Inquirer* readers will have seen – or will be seeing – Steven Spielberg's latest film, 'Lincoln'. It is an intriguing, perceptive, and revealing portrait of the great US President in the final months of his life. The Civil War is drawing to its close and the House of Representatives is locked in a bitter political struggle, with Lincoln's Republicans desperate to secure the final abolition of American slavery, by means of a 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the US Constitution, before the defeated southern states are re-admitted to the Union. Lincoln's determination to see this through is set amidst a web of political intrigue, compromised idealism, and ferocious debate, as he struggles, not only with his opponents in Congress, but also with his own grief and sorrow at the carnage of war.

Although no Unitarians or Universalists are identified in the film, it is worth recalling that many featured prominently on the Union side and in the ranks of the Abolitionists. Among them was Julia Ward Howe, who at Lincoln's request, wrote the 'Battle Hymn of the Republic' ('Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord...'), to which the Union armies marched. Its tune was that of a song praising the militant Abolitionist, John Brown, whose pre-war exploits had won the support of radical Unitarian minister, Theodore Parker, amongst others. Transcendentalist influences have been identified in Lincoln's immortal Gettysburg Address, and no Transcendentalist had been more committed to the Abolitionist cause than Parker – although he died the year before war broke out.

The Unitarian minister, Thomas Starr King, was instrumental in keeping California on the Union side, and gained Lincoln's personal thanks for doing so. Lincoln also praised two other Unitarians, the Rev Henry Bellows and the formidable nursing reformer, Dorothea Lynde Dix, for their work in improving the appalling medical provision for the wounded of the Union armies. In 1863, when President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation authorised the recruitment of African Americans into the Union Army, the first such regiment to be raised in the north, the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, had as its commander a Unitarian called Robert Gould Shaw. This young white officer – who was killed in action – and the black volunteers he led are commemorated in a striking high-relief bronze memorial (by Augustus Saint-Gaudens) on Boston's Beacon Street, nearly opposite the headquarters of the Unitarian Universalist Association. (And, their story was told in the 1989 film *Glory*.)

But all these figures are probably well-known to those with an interest in American Unitarian Universalist history. Another Unitarian, a close friend of Lincoln's at an earlier stage in his political career, is less celebrated. His name is Jesse Fell. Like Lincoln, there were Quakers in his family tree, and also like Lincoln, he had left that tradition behind. He studied law and became the first lawyer in the new town of Bloomington in McLean County, Illinois, where he settled in 1834. He soon became involved in public affairs, notably in the struggle to prevent McLean County from being annexed by its neighbours. This meant spending the winter of 1834/5 in the then State Capital of Vandalia, where he shared accommodation with a Whig legislator, John Todd Stuart, and a lawyer from Springfield (the present State Capital) named Abraham Lincoln. Abe Lincoln and Jesse Fell became close friends and



Daniel Day-Lewis as President Abraham Lincoln in the film 'Lincoln', directed by Steven Spielberg. Photo courtesy of BFI

political allies. In 1836, Lincoln and Fell campaigned for Stuart against the Democratic candidate for Congress, Stephen A Douglas. The following year, Fell was bankrupted in a financial panic, and it was some time before he was able to return to politics.

Twelve years later, with the slavery issue at crisis point, Fell suggested the influential Lincoln – Douglas debate, which paved the way for Lincoln's Presidential bid in 1860. In 1859, Fell asked Lincoln for a brief autobiography to be used in a campaign to secure the Republican nomination. In his letter to Lincoln, Fell wrote: 'I have a decided impression that if your popular history and efforts on the slavery question can be sufficiently brought before the people, you can be made a formidable, if not a successful, candidate for the Presidency.' At the Republican Convention it was Jesse Fell who suggested the tactics which out-manoeuvred Lincoln's rival for the nomination, William Seward of New York – who afterwards became Secretary of State in Lincoln's Administration. With the nomination secured, Fell telegraphed Lincoln with this message: "City wild with excitement. From my inmost heart I congratulate you."

When the Civil War broke out, Jesse Fell was appointed as a paymaster for the Union Army, but resigned in 1863. After the war he established a Soldiers' Orphans' Home in North Bloomington – now Normal – one of several towns that Fell

(Continued on next page)



# UCCN: Being seen *and* heard

By Lesley Harris

Registration has just opened for the next Unitarian Communication Coordinators' Network (UCCN) conference planned for 8-10 November. This report from the 2012 conference gives an idea of what the UCCN is all about. In early November, a happy band of Unitarian communicators had a fascinating and fun-filled weekend on the subject of 'Being Seen and Heard'.

Firstly we tackled 'being seen on the web' with James Barry explaining how to set up congregation websites. There is a ready-made template available on the UK Unitarians website: [www.ukunitarians.org.uk](http://www.ukunitarians.org.uk) which congregations can use to create their websites. James introduced a new template which will be available this year. This will include menus with links to permanent features 'About' and 'Contacts' on the left, menus with links to day-to-day features such as 'Latest News' on the right, a nice photo of the congregation in the middle, and then links to Facebook and Twitter, along with a Google calendar for events. This talk was very ably complemented by Yvonne Aburrow, who tackled 'being seen on social media' with an amusing and down to earth talk about how to use Facebook and Twitter.

Angela Maher gave us an entertaining 'Round the Websites and Posters Tour' of existing strap lines, composed mostly by a wonderful assortment of transatlantic church congregations. She explained that a strapline is a short sentence or phrase which sums up who or what you are in not more than six words. So therefore: 'Unitarians – building bridges – not walls' is an example of a good strapline.

On the subject of being heard, James Barry and John Wilkin-son, ably supported by keen and technically savvy Unitarian Youth, showed us how to manage audio and video technology when recording chapel services, podcasts and interviews. James had lots of good tips about what types of microphones to use, how to prevent them from popping, how to do autocues, how to use mixers, and so on.

All the talks were complemented by workshops. Yvonne and James directed fairly large groups who practised Facebook,



*Participants at UCCN 2013.*

Twitter and technical skills; while Ann Peart and I helped a smaller group compose future strap lines for congregation websites and posters. We also prepared short reflections about topics like 'Why I became a Unitarian'.

Being seen and being heard then came together when some people were interviewed by members of the British Unitarian Young Adults Network. We battled bravely with microphones roaming in the wrong places, autocues overtaking the speakers, bright lights dazzling the interviewees, waving hands and nervous tics filmed for all to see. But the content of our interviews was good, the experience was great and good-natured fun and photos of our sessions can be seen on [www.kyla.co.uk/pics.zip](http://www.kyla.co.uk/pics.zip)

The conference culminated with a recording of Tony Mc-Neile's inspired Sunday morning service. Our next UCCN weekend is planned for 8-10 November, when we shall be learning more about creating blogs, good newsletters and further video work. For more information contact Joan Wilkin-son on 01332 814055 or email [joan@yorkshiregirl.org.uk](mailto:joan@yorkshiregirl.org.uk). A booking form is available on [www.uccn.org.uk](http://www.uccn.org.uk). We hope that everyone who is interested will come and join us.

*Lesley Harris is a member of Oat Street Chapel, Evesham.*

## Unitarian worked to educate black children

*(Continued from previous page)*

was instrumental in founding. Fell had been a fervent Abolitionist and once the war was over he was eager to improve the lot of the newly-freed slaves. He supported racial integration in the education system and was 'outraged' that 'colored children' were 'excluded from the public schools' and denied a 'public education because of the color of their skin.' Fell helped African Americans to find work in Bloomington and its near neighbour, which was to become Normal, and employed many himself.

In the twin-cities of Bloomington and Normal today, Fell's influence continues in many ways. He owned and co-edited their daily newspaper, the 'Pantagraph' (originally the 'Bloomington Intelligencer'). He was instrumental in bringing the railroad to town. He was influential in the foundation of the Illinois State Normal University – now ISU, the 'Normal' having been transferred from the University's name to that of the city. And Jesse Fell, together with his brother, Kerson, also organised Bloomington's Free Congregational Church – now the Unitarian Universalist Church of Bloomington, Illinois. The church, where I conducted an exchange ministry in 1992,

has in its possession a chair that once belonged to Jesse Fell's friend and fellow-campaigner, Abraham Lincoln.

One last thing. Fell's political genes were inherited by his great-grandson, Adlai Stevenson, one of America's most important politicians of the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century. Stevenson – a member of the same Unitarian church that Jesse Fell had founded – was elected Governor of Illinois in 1948, a time when he was opposing the McCarthyite witch-hunts. He was twice the Democratic candidate for the US Presidency, running unsuccessfully against Dwight D Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956. In 1960, he was pipped for the nomination by John F Kennedy, who afterwards, as President, appointed Stevenson as US Ambassador to the United Nations. In that capacity he played an important role in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. After his sudden and untimely death in London in 1965, Adlai Stevenson was buried in Bloomington's Evergreen Cemetery. Like his great-grandfather, the friend and ally of Abraham Lincoln, Stevenson was a committed and active witness to the principles of our liberal faith in troubled and dangerous times.

*The Rev Clifford M Reed is a retired Unitarian minister.*



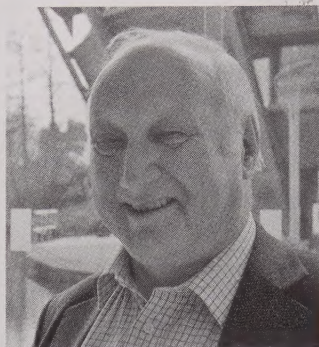
# Fighting sleep in a pew is nothing new

By Alan Ruston

Who was Eutychus? I've a university diploma in religious studies but this stumped me as I suspect it will most readers of the *Inquirer*. Eutychus was a young man who fell asleep while listening to an address by St Paul and fell out of a window, but was revived. The incident is described in the Book of Acts Chapter 20 verses 9 to 12. Ever since, I now understand, Eutychus has been taken as the example of what can happen to those who don't pay attention to sermons.

*Eutychus and his relations* is the title of a book written by a Unitarian minister Brooke Herford (1820-1903) and first published anonymously in 1861. Then, of course, in a Biblically knowledgeable age most readers would have known the association with the story in Acts. It caused quite a stir at the time as the then-contemporary Mr Eutychus describes the congregations he encountered and the ministers who spoke to them while visiting his cousins. The book does not mention any denomination but as Brooke was born and brought up within Unitarianism and served it in both Britain and America all his life, there was no mistaking who he was talking about. The reason for my reading it now is that I'm preparing an entry on Brooke Herford for the online Unitarian Universalist Biographical Dictionary. (See [www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/](http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/))

It's a short work, flows easily and a pleasant read. It was republished after his death in 1905 and again in the USA in



Alan Ruston

2008 (it's still available on Amazon). Are there any connections between what he found among Unitarian congregations located in cities and the countryside and our 21<sup>st</sup> century congregations? It seems to me that there are some considerable similarities. I've preached, listened to services and observed congregational relationships with ministers for 50 years now, so I might claim some experience. I even admit to going to sleep sometimes during what we now call 'the address' – but not, of course, when I'm doing the talking. Brooke states the eternal problem:

'What a curious sensation it is, that of gradually falling off to sleep! I take it for granted that you try to keep awake, perhaps you are in a strange pew, or there is nothing to lean against, and you'd be likely to start up in waking. How you screw up your mind, and look fixedly at the pulpit, with a desperate effort to make head or tail of the words which seem to dribble into your mind and dribble out again. You feel your eyelids begin to fall. No! you won't; and you shake your head and try again. And you succeed; yes you feel you are taking in every word, no doubt about it; and soon the voice has changed, the subject has run off at a tangent; you have no longer any feelings of being sleepy, and – and suddenly you start and find you must have been asleep for the preacher is still hammering on and your neighbour is gazing reproachfully at you, with that self-righteous look which is so repulsive a characteristic of wakeful persons.'

Writing about what he calls a 'fastidious' congregation Brooke concludes, 'some have a tendency to stonify their prophets and afterwards build them sepulchres ... their old minister, who has been at rest these 20 years, and whose last days were embittered by a chronic state of congregational dissatisfaction, arising out of his old sermons, his dislike of visiting and his humdrum ways, has since been canonised in their affectionate remembrance as an ideal preacher and pastor, and is constantly thrown at the heads of the rising generation. Since his demise they may be said not to have been settled.'

He also has things to say about ministers – the closing section is superbly titled 'Parsonic Vinegar'. When talking about a minister's district dinner where the conversation could be overheard, 'an endeavour was made by some to transact some business, but they were soon voted bores, and only drew down upon themselves the unsparing witticisms of the rest ... the older ministers were the worst; they were the most utterly incorrigible jesters; they told the most mischievous stories; they seemed most like schoolboys let out of school. Mr Eutychus then asked his cousins who had provided the meal what they thought of what they heard ... they responded with an anecdote of old Dr M who shocked a young Evangelical by what he thought was his unbecoming levity, 'Sir, are you a serious Christian?' Dr M response was, 'No, I am a jocose one.' and the elder one added that really she did not think that ministers were so fond of gossip.'

While some parts of the book are reflective of its time, the remainder has a timeless quality and is well worth reading. We like to think that we live in a unique age. But with non-conformist churches, even in our age of Google and iPhones, some things never change.

*Alan Ruston is a member of the Watford Fellowship.*

## HARRIS MANCHESTER COLLEGE CONFERENCE: MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN OUR CONGREGATIONS

JUNE 2013

We are holding a Conference which, we hope, will appeal to all Ministers, Lay Pastors, Lay Leaders and Students for the Ministry from Monday June 24th to Wednesday, June 29th. (Monday at 4.00 p.m. until Wednesday lunch). The cost will be £130, plus a small conference fee of £20. There is this year for the first time a £90 option for a single room with a shared bathroom.

Our speakers will include Rev Stephen Willis: Managing mental health issues among our congregants, Rev Sheila Martin: Bullying in our congregations – coping strategies and Lynette Harborne: Sustaining mental & spiritual health among our ministry.

The Annual Service at the Conference will be conducted by the Rev. Martin Whitell, new President of MOSA & minister of our Portsmouth chapel.

We choose to meet when the College is holding its end of term proceedings, which will include the annual meeting of honorary Governors and Friends on Tuesday afternoon and the Valediction Service of our Oxford ministerial students. Please contact Jane Barraclough, preferably by email at the address below if you would like to come, unless you are a member of MOSA in which case you will receive the booking forms as usual. The deadline for bookings to be received is the 1st June. We would like to see all those interested in the topic.

**Jane Barraclough**

**Secretary, HMC Ministerial Old Students' Association  
Cross St Chapel, Manchester M2 1NL**

**Tel: 0161 8340019; email: [revjvb@gmail.com](mailto:revjvb@gmail.com)**



# We're all still here, headed for spring

So, here comes the spring equinox and we are all still here. On 21 December, there was talk of the world coming to an end, a prediction drawn from the Mesoamerican Long Count Calendar, the one used in Central America in ancient times. It calculated the ending of the world on the same day as our Winter solstice, and some of our so-called New Age groups got quite excited.

At about noon on the appointed day, I was in the checkout queue in my local supermarket. A customer nearby gazed at his trolley full of Christmas fare, grinned and said breezily, 'I thought the world was supposed to be coming to an end today; I thought I wouldn't have to bother with all this!'

He got a laugh from folk nearby, so I joined in. 'Just shows, you can't rely on anything these days, can you?'

'Nah,' said another shopper. 'You shouldn't believe all you read in the papers. Anyway, we've about 12 hours to go, yet.'

'No,' said the first man with mock-serious insistence, 'it was supposed to be at 5 past 11. It looks like we've missed it.'

A woman joined in, though I couldn't quite tell how serious she was. 'Ah well,' she said, glumly, 'I suppose we'll just have to soldier on.'

*What!* The universe has been redeemed from total annihilation, and her best response is, 'I suppose we'll just have to soldier on'? Is that extreme pessimism, cynicism, or the belief that life is just for putting up with? Answers on a post-card, please.

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If, like me, you can see some absurdity in that conversation, you would also have enjoyed an edition of the Radio 4 programme called *I've Never Seen Star Wars*. Marcus Brigstocke interviews guests and gets them to face up to something they've avoided, or just never experienced. (Mine, by the way, is that I've never watched *Coronation Street*. Please don't ever ask me to.) A January guest was Rastafarian (i.e. ganja-smoking) poet Benjamin Zephaniah (he of the dreadlocks and Brummie accent, having been born in Handsworth, the 'Jamaican capital of Europe', he calls it.) He had never read *Winnie the Pooh* and was being encouraged to look at the stories. That's quite a cultural leap, from the rural West Indian, semi-literate, oral tradition of his parents, via Handsworth to the nice, white middle-class cosiness of AA Milne's Hundred Acre Wood. He described himself as being 'blown away' by *Winnie the Pooh*, 'Because there is so much poetry in it.'

'Listen to this bit,' he said. 'This is Roo: "I love jumping," said Roo. "Let's see who can jump the farthest, you or me."'

"I can," said Tigger: "But we mustn't stop now or we'll be late."

"Late for what?" said Roo

"For whatever we want to be in time for," said Tigger.'

Zephaniah was enthralled by this. 'Now come on, he's on drugs, ain't he? he suggested.

There was more:

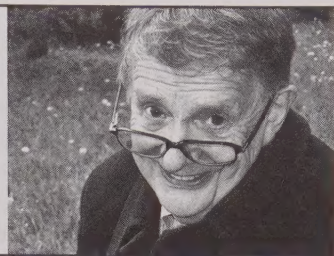
'Pooh asks Christopher Robin where he is going. Christopher says, "No-where." So they began to go there. They go there to do nothing.'

Winnie the Pooh characters going nowhere, to do nothing, on drugs? I love it! And Zephaniah finds this final piece quite beautiful:

'Pooh says, "Poetry and hums aren't things that you get. They are things that get you. And all you can do is go where

## Funny Old World

By  
John Midgley



they can find you.'"

I like that too, and wonder if by 'hums' Pooh really means 'hymns'. And perhaps what he says about them, and poems, is true of worship.

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In the past *The Inquirer* has published poems, sometimes to great acclaim, sometimes to the annoyance of readers who didn't like to see them there. Former editor Keith Gilley, a poet himself, was keen, and told me that he was never short of poetry contributions, so I suggested that he start a Unitarian poetry society. I felt sure that such a group might arouse a lot of interest and prove as successful as the Unitarian Music Society. This attracts good numbers to its weekends and has many successes to its credit, including CDs of hymn (hum?) tunes. Poetry isn't quite my scene and Keith, alas, is no longer with us to organise a poetry society. But somebody might. I can imagine a weekend conference of Unitarian poets, having a great time together at Great Hucklow. No drugs, mind.

\*\*\*

It's good to get responses to items from previous columns, so I'm grateful to Derek McAuley at Essex Hall for pointing me towards a website of the British Humanist Association which includes the slogan, 'Are you a Humanist without knowing it?' It seems they have stolen our slogan, if not our clothes. Is nothing sacred? Ah, well, we'll just have to soldier on.

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Also in a previous column, I mentioned the musical show, *The Book of Mormon*, advertised as outrageously funny and scurrilously offensive satire on Mormonism. It arrives in London this month and a You-tube trailer gives clues as to its character. A January radio interview with Jimmy Osmond added an interesting sidelight. He is the youngest of the singing Osmond family and is still performing, as well as being a go-getting businessman. The Osmonds were 1970s chart-topping stars and are well known for being Mormons, so he was asked about the show. 'Yes, we're Christians,' Jimmy said, adding that his mother was a theologian who taught that there is truth to be found in all religions. I was surprised, never having heard tolerant liberalism from Mormons before. Pressed about the show, he said he had no desire to see it, knowing it was an attack on his faith, but added, 'You know, in our church we have a slogan about it. We say, "You've seen the play, now read the book!"'

That's a very good response, making me wonder if any satirists would ever have a go at us. Alas we don't exactly have an equivalent book for anyone to send up. I can't imagine anyone making much of a show out of *Errors of the Trinity*, though perhaps someone with a vivid imagination could produce something based on Cliff Reed's book, and give us *Unitarian, What's That? – the Musical*.

*The Rev John Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.*



# Letters to the Editor

## GA should release election figures

To the Editor:

As a candidate in the latest GA Executive Committee electoral process, it concerns me greatly that the electorate is being denied knowledge of the actual votes cast for each candidate. Not only does this contradict the much-emphasised denominational 'imperative' for transparency but is contrary to established electoral practice insofar as national-level elections in bodies ultimately accountable to statute such as the Companies or Charities Acts are concerned. Frankly, I fail to discern any honourable basis for this 'practice'. The sole serving Director of the election's independent operator (Mrs A Hock of Popularis Limited: Company Registration No. 4327718) in responding on December 24th to my enquiry stated that her report on the said election was 'in accordance with the instructions received from the Electoral Panel'. This could be interpreted to mean that our GA's Electoral Panel, by its actions and for reasons known only to them, did

not perceive a need to make readily available crucial information which *ipso facto* should be in the public domain. Even the results e-mail to all 7 official candidates only stated 'Elected' against 5 names, with no narrative against the other 2 names. No voting figures featured.

I was also troubled by the self-appointment of an 'Election Questions Webmaster' (a Stockport Unitarian) who then augmented this unofficial role to include that of being moderator in respect of any submitted question-responses from any of the candidates. The risk of finding oneself being obliquely disadvantaged consequent to finding that the moderator's style of editorship differed from how a candidate naturally couched their considered response was too great where I was concerned and my legal adviser was quick to urge me not to participate in this optional 'facility'. This aspect should be exclusively under the direct supervision of the GA Executive Committee, with any questions processed under their jurisdiction, in the interests of regularity, in my view.

This state of affairs surely cannot be a

good way to promote cohesion within a religious fraternity which some see nowadays as grappling with survival difficulties.

**David E Gillman**

The Great Meeting House, Coventry

## Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to [inquirer@btinternet.com](mailto:inquirer@btinternet.com). Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF.

Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes. Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers' names are for identification purposes only, and should not suggest the view expressed is representative of that body.

# Responses to the 2012 Channing lecture

To the Editor:

I thoroughly enjoyed David Usher's interesting and thought-provoking William Ellery Channing Lecture, published in two parts in *The Inquirer* recently. Being a relatively new recruit to the Unitarian cause, I am not in a position to say, as he does, that we are 'stuck in the past' for, unlike his, my experience of the movement is limited. I do believe, however, everyone with a religious message needs to make it 'meaningful and relevant to the present day', and the failure of many churches to do just this is the very reason for their decline.

How to adjust successfully to the modern world, of course, is the million-dollar question, but here I think David leaves a lot unexplained. How does he actually visualize a relevant, modern-day service? Have a big screen instead of hymn books, use more modern music, are certainly two concrete suggestions, but I doubt whether some of these modern tunes are as accessible as some of the old favourites that can be sung with real gusto. Just look at our 'new' Sing Your Faith hymn book: some lovely words but some ghastly tunes.

Words are not enough, OK, but what do we put in their place – dance, drama (but that's more words), or perhaps mime? He talks of using props and visuals, but what sort of props? Like David, I have thought myself that many of the readings we get, excellent though they may be, are unintelligible to the

congregation on just one hearing, so I do share his concern for the over-emphasis put on words, but at the same time I do wonder what we are going to replace them with. Certainly, members of the congregation could be supplied with a copy of the readings, which would help, but we are still in the area of words.

David talks about learning from different denominations and, like him, I have tried in the past some other types of worship provided by such groups. But, like him again, the theology left me cold. The problem, it seems to me, is how do you – in the Unitarian church – make the worship, as David says, 'uplifting, inspiring, inviting' when our appeal is to reason and not to the emotions? It's OK to have people waving their arms, even dancing in the aisle, at a charismatic service, but if you want people to make up their own minds about their belief, to be sceptical about what they hear and go with their own conscience, how on earth can you make such a service really exciting?

David clearly has strong views on this subject and I would welcome further articles from him with specific details as to how we are to reach this 'Promised Land'.

**Graham Williams**

Kidderminster New Meeting House



# Responses to the 2012 Channing lecture

To the Editor:

I am a *very* newly, self-confessed Unitarian. In fact it is only a few months since I came out of the closet, ran my 'true colours' up the mast and defected from the Anglican church.

I therefore read the Rev Dr David Usher's Channing lecture excerpts in *The Inquirer* with great interest. I found Part 1 quite inspirational. It was certainly inspiring enough to prompt me to look at his web site and investigate further. I even pinched some of his words to support a draft sermon I am planning to deliver in the near future on behalf of my new and clearly hard-pressed church. (I'm not trained but I know exactly where I am theologically and how to sell what I believe, so I'll give it a go).

Part 2, however, was disappointing. It rambled on against the Unitarian establishment in a way rather reminiscent of Spike Milligan's famous parody of the Good Samaritan parable, with an unclear message about letting go of something (not clear what) and moving on in search of some promised land (not clear where). Am I missing something?

Regarding *letting go*: if the parallel being drawn is with that of Channing's partial, doctrinal apostasy of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, then obviously, that doesn't usefully work a second time. So I must infer that what we are supposed to be *letting go* of this time around is the current pastoral infrastructure, rather than adjust what we believe to be the current position of the Unitarian church relative to other beliefs. As far as the *promised land* is concerned I also have to infer from the analogy that we are now being encouraged to dream up new ways of selling Unitarianism to an increasingly secular population but without deterring it. If so, then of course that was never going to be easy. Everyone realises that.

Some years ago, a controversial forecast, based on a *snapshot* census of church attendances in UK, was seized upon by secular groups as proof that the established church is in decline. Obviously that is no longer in any doubt. The Church of England rejected the figures, of course, claiming that they were incomplete and cited, albeit reluctantly, the *new ways* of worshipping outside the church network for inclusion in the figures. I actually see that last bit as encouraging.

The knock-on effect of this general decline is that there will inevitably be corresponding effects outside the mainstream church network, including Unitarianism. Clearly this general malaise is not the fault of individual Unitarians.

As I see it, after only a few weeks, Unitarianism may very well have its own built in self-destruct mechanism, by virtue of its wide ranging liberalism. I personally, have declared from the outset that I am a Unitarian Christian based on my belief that Jesus Christ was only a man, not God. To me, that precisely defines Unitarianism, clearly and unambiguously, as it was tacitly defined by the first Jewish Christians in the first century.

Just think about it. If some disillusioned churchgoers go shopping around for something else, what are they actually going to find laid out on the Unitarian pick-n-mix stall? Liberal Unitarianism has inarguably been a useful position to adopt. Unfortunately, it makes us unable to say succinctly who we are as a movement because there are too many variations on the theme; Join us and you can do as you like? Is that really what we are supposed to tell them? Or is David now hinting at

reining in some of that liberal latitude, in order to fall in with the new requirements of our new and different world?

I think David might have made a more decisive impact in Part 2 if he had offered some specific suggestions as opposed to veiled generalisations. No matter. In the meantime, the rest of us will continue trying to raise the profile of our church in more 'in your face' ways, (I have to say I didn't know ours existed until I found it on the internet). Crucially we will also continue our efforts to engage with younger people.

**Graham Phoenix**

Ansdeil Unitarian Church

## Unitarians are not an enslaved race

To the Editor:

Having read Part 1 of the William Ellery Channing Lecture (*Inquirer* 23 January 2013) in which the Rev Dr David Usher couches his thoughts on the state of Unitarianism in Britain today, I was initially engaged by the promise of his vision for the future of our cause in Part 2. However on reading Part 2, I was baffled by Rev Dr Usher's already overworked Part 1 metaphor, deploying the Old Testament Exodus from Egypt, stretched beyond the point of rational application, in mock King Jamesian language (*Inquirer* 2 February).

The Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt hardly appears to be an appropriate basis for comparison with Unitarians past and present. Yes, we have had our Unitarian Martyrs, difficulties and challenges: but Unitarians an enslaved race, driven forth by a fear of persecution?

Lacking in relevant contextualisation or definition of his terms, the Rev Dr Usher's lecture reads as a rant: it gives Unitarians in Britain today a resounding 'telling off' but is a desert indeed. Should the Rev Dr Usher see himself as a present day Moses, he offers nothing to inspire, succour or illumine the future of Unitarianism. This William Ellery Channing Lecture comes across as a promotion of inward-looking sectarianism which is contrary to the freedom of conscience for which many of our Unitarian forefathers fought with no thought of self-aggrandisement.

**Janice Croucher**

Framlingham Congregation, FOY Society  
and the Unitarian Music Society

## A clearly articulated vision is needed

To the Editor:

I have much sympathy with the thoughts expressed in Dr David Usher's Channing Lecture published in *The Inquirer* on 1 January and 2 February.

However, it seems to me that the Rev Dr Usher is himself repeating his own criticism of 'words, words, words, words.' The only solution for our decline he offers, seems to be that we adapt some form of 'happy clappy' service based on our own theological approach. Oh no, no, no, no!

I believe that what, in fact, we desperately need is a clear vision of our purposes and aims beyond that of simply keeping our places of worship open; a vision such as Moses had of the promised land and as Channing had of a liberal, free church. If we have such a vision let it be clearly articulated and proclaimed. If we have no such vision we will surely die.

**Ralph Brown**

Plymouth





## York Unitarians support homeless charity

At the 27 January worship service at St Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, cheques totalling £1,500 were presented by Claire Lee, Chairperson of York Unitarians, to Dave Knowles, Chief Executive of Peasholme Charity for the homeless, the congregation's chosen charity for 2012.

Claire explained why the community chose Peasholme Charity. 'We think it's important that we give financial support to a local charity each year in addition to all our other commitments in the community,' said Claire. 'Last year it seemed appropriate to support the Peasholme Charity as there has been increasing concern about the effects of economic pressures on homeless people and the charities that help them. The charity does important work in the city, working with other agencies to provide a range of services for homeless and insecurely housed people.'

As part of raising the money, every chapel community member was given a tube of Smarties, the well-known and popular chocolate sweets originally made in York, and asked to return it full of 20p coins or other coins of their choice. A group of members also undertook a six-mile sponsored walk.

Dave Knowles, chief executive of Peasholme Charity, expressed thanks to York Unitarians for their support. 'With such community support, we can reduce rough sleeping and homelessness, helping people to have better quality lives. The charity works with people who are at risk of becoming homeless – preventing homelessness by helping people overcome their difficulties. It also works with people who have become homeless, helping them to move into secure long-term housing and providing support to help them re-establish themselves in the community.'

– Alan Pennington and Janet Eldred

# 2020

## Growing Unitarianism in the UK

### New web site for Development Programme

The '2020 Congregational Development Programme' will officially launch after the 2013 GA Conference at Nottingham. This is a plan to launch up to 17 new and renewed congregations across Great Britain by 2020. It will contribute to the growth

strategy agreed by the General Assembly in 2010, prioritising the desire to increase membership by 20% within five years. The 2020 website went live last month. It provides information about the project. Unitarians across Great Britain are invited to check out the site at [www.2020unitarian.org](http://www.2020unitarian.org).

– Andy Pakula

## John Pounds celebrated 350 years



*The Rev Martin Whitell and GA President Lis Dyson-Jones with volunteers who dressed in period costumes.*

As our congregation's 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary coincided with the Heritage Open Days last autumn, we at John Pounds Memorial Church, Portsmouth, opened up our celebrations to the wider public to introduce some of our long history as well as our living ethos.

At the church we had a few exhibitions depicting the history of the congregation and telling the stories of some of the influential and interesting ministers who have served it. Volunteers were on hand to explain our ethos and the nature of our worship, and pleasingly many people, including teenagers, expressed a genuine interest in Unitarianism.

Our replica of the workshop/school of our patron John Pounds was also open to the public, with volunteers on hand to tell the inspirational story of the kind-hearted cobbler. In the spirit of John Pounds, who educated hundreds of destitute children in 19<sup>th</sup> century Portsmouth, and who would seek them out from the dreary streets with his coat pockets filled with hot potatoes, there were jacket potatoes freely available to any visitors who wanted one.

During both days there was an opportunity for members of our church to visit Portsmouth Cathedral, where the first minister of the congregation, Benjamin Burgess, was ejected in 1662 and where he is now buried. (The only non-conformist minister to be buried in an Anglican place of worship so we were informed), which was gladly taken up, with prayers and the lighting of candles offered in thanksgiving to the courageous gentleman whose bravery and independent mind made our church possible.

Both open days were a great success and created both an increased sense of community and fellowship in the congregation and a very large increase in our local visibility.

The highlight of the weekend was the very well attended Anniversary Service on Sunday morning at which we were happy to welcome familiar faces, those of some children and their parents who had visited the church during the Open Days. We were honoured to have the GA President Lis Dyson-Jones join us in our celebrations.

– Christopher Sande